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ABSTRACT

This study explores the different meanings of "ahora" (now) and "ahorita" (right now) in Spanish usage by a migrant community of mushroom pickers in Mexico and the United States. Both terms are used as temporal expressions in Mexican Spanish spoken on both sides of the border. They are discourse markers. After studying groups in each area, it is concluded that these terms have over time developed different meanings, mainly due to the relative isolation of the mushroom pickers. (KFT)

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# "AHORA" (NOW) AND "AHORITA" (RIGHT NOW) AS DEICTIC MARKERS

**MARIADELALUZ MATUS-MENDOZA, Ph.D.**
**UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA**
**ORLANDO, FLORIDA**

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## "Ahora" (Now) and "Ahorita" (Right Now) as Deictic Markers

This study explores the different meanings of "ahora" (now) and "ahorita" (right now) in Spanish usage by a migrant community of mushroom pickers in two countries; Mexico and the United States. "Ahora" (now) and "ahorita" (right now) are two common temporal expressions in Mexican Spanish. They are used as discourse markers in ways that reflect their properties as time deictics: they provide a temporal index in discourse time. Both communities, Moroleon and Kennett Square show different tendencies in the use of "ahora" that may suggest an influence of the informants' working environment. Moroleon, in general, offers standard uses of these deictics. Kennett Square, on the other hand, exhibits non standard semantic uses.

Moroleón is in the State of Guanajuato. This town is surrounded by Jalisco, San Luis Potosí, Querétaro and Michoacán. According to the census of 1990, there are 48,191 inhabitants in this town: 23,078 men and 25,113 women. The prevailing activity is tailoring: 21,744 inhabitants work for this industry. The second important activity registered by the census of 1990 is trade with

2,816. This town is well-known in the country because of the tailoring industry. Men and women from Moroleón have come to Kennett Square, Pennsylvania to work primarily on mushroom farms; some of these emigrants come for nine months and return to their hometown for the remaining three months of the year. Others stay in the area saving money to bring their families to the United States. Kennett Square, itself, is a rural area belonging to Chester County, originally settled in 1705, at the time of the census of 1990, there was a total population of 5,218 persons, of which 413 were males of Hispanic origin and 242 were women of Hispanic origin. This town is considered the major shipping center for fresh mushrooms. The informants for this research are mainly workers of Kaolin Mushroom Farms. According to the figures of the farms, there are more than 400 Mexicans working for this company. It is interesting to point out that Mexicans who come to work here change not only their country but also their activities. From a tailoring industry in Moroleón they come to an agricultural activity in Kennett Square.

Eighty-three interviews, from thirty to sixty minutes each, were recorded following traditional sociolinguistic methodology (Labov: 1984). I employed thematic modules developed by a series

of questions focused on issues of education, work, men's and women's roles, and difficulties associated with emigration and immigration processes.

"Ahora" has a deictic value, but it can also fulfill connector functions (Lamíquiz: 1993). Considering "ahora" a temporal deictic, this relates to the specific moment of speaking as seen in example (1); it may be a proximal deictic which locates an utterance in a ego-centered space, i.e., space dominated by the producer, rather than the receiver, of an utterance (Schiffrin:1987). When acquires connective functions in the discourse, exhibits an adversative value equivalent to 'however' as seen in example (2) where "ahora" opposes the content of the first part of the utterance. It can also serve to call the attention to a new aspect in the conversation in initial position of the utterance; it works as a transitional bridge to new sub-topics of the discourse as seen in example (3).

> (1) Nosotros... ***ahora*** questamos iniciando un nuevo periodo de un nuevo gobernador, pues el trae otras miras hacia el campo...
> (We are ***now*** beginning a new period of a new governor, he has some other ideas for the peasants)
>
> (2) Mi esposa antes ella no trabajaba. ***Ahora*** si trabaja porque ya compre máquinas...

(My wife didn't work before. [But] ***now*** she works because I already bought sawing machines)

(3) Los domingos nos vamos a dormir como a las, como a las once. ***Ahora*** cuando no traemos novia, cuando no traemos novia, pues este a las siete y media estamos en el jardín…
(On Sundays we go to bed around, around eleven. ***Now***, when we don't have a girlfriend, when we don't have a girlfriend, err at half past seven we are in the garden…

The diminutive form of "ahora" and "ahorita" flavor Mexican Spanish. These two deictics suffer several phonological changes, first, they sometimes reduce to "ahora" [aora] > [ora] and "ahorita" [aorita] > [orita] by the effect of aphaeresis; "Ahorita" undergoes further reductions to [oita] by the effect of syncope. "Ahorita" acts like a semantic filler with different functions other than the ones stated before with "ahora". It may refer to the immediate moment of the utterance like in example number one, or it may not refer to that at all, but rather to a situation that is years away from the speaker's experience, see example (4). Although "ahorita" can be found in people's speech of all levels of education, this deictic appears more often among informants with low levels of education.

(4) a. ¿Pus que podria platicarle ***ahorita*** puesn oiga? ***Horita*** no sé como esten las cosas yo por allá pues…

a. What could I tell you ***right now*** you see? Right now I don't know how things are over there…

b. bueno ***horita*** vivo ya en Moroleón, pero soy de un rancho que es ahí cerquita de Moroleón, Las Peñas.
Well, I live ***right now*** in Moroleon, but I am from a hamlet that is there very near Moroleon, Las Peñas…

In (4a) the speaker refers in time to the precise moment of the conversation stating his impossibility to expand on the most recent events occurred in Moroleon due to the fact that he is living in Kennett Square when the interview takes place. The use of space deictic "alla" (over there) underlines the distance time and space in reference to Moroleon. Example number (4b) uttered by the same informant during the same conversation, in contrast, gives the deictic "ahorita" a past connotation; he has been living in Kennett Square for a couple of years. In this case, interestingly, the space deictic "ahí" (there) helps to express the paradoxically meaning that "ahorita" has acquired; it seems to be both; close and far in time.

To the uses of "ahora" and "ahorita" mentioned previously, it is possible to add other expressions with "ahora" that are reinforced with monomorphemic words. These may imply a comparison expressed by "como ahora" or "como ahorita" (like

now); duration expressed by "hasta ahora" "hasta ahorita" (until now); emphasis and immediate actions expressed by "ya ahora", "ya ahorita" (already now); and the most innovative are "de ahora" or "de ora" meaning 'from that time' or 'since', and the interjection "ahora si" or "ora si".

The sociolinguistic factor groups considered to analyze the data are generation, origin, gender, education and migration patterns. In origin, there are three categories from the rancherias (small hamlets), from the rancherias to the city, and from the city. The education factor offers two low and upper levels of instruction: primary (from zero up to sixth grade); middle school (from seventh grade up to ninth grade); secondary (from tenth to twelfth grades, this includes high school or secretarial training), and post secondary (from thirteenth up to seventeenth, professional, doctors, engineers, etc). Considering generation, the sample is divided in three different age groups: the youngest group has people from 18 to 34 years old, the middle age group informants from 35 to 55, and the oldest group persons older than 55. Lastly, but not less important, migration patterns consider people who have migrated to the cities within Mexico, to the United States and who have never migrated.

From these factor groups just two, education and migration patterns, seem to be relevant in the analysis in Moroleon. The diminutive forms of the deictic "ahora" and the reduction of "ahora" and "ahorita" present 50% percent of occurrence less than in Kennett Square. A great majority of the occurrences of "ahorita" and its reduced forms belong to lower levels of instruction such as primary and middle school. The reinforced deictics "como ahora", "hasta ahora" and "ya ahora" occur 60% less than among the informants of the mushroom farms within the same group. This may suggest that the people in Moroleon master wider vocabulary; they don't need the constant recurrence of these deictics. However, the meaning attached to these deictics seem to be restricted to fewer meanings than in Kennett Square, for example, "ya ahora" just emphasizes the message as seen in example (5):

> (5)…¿cómo le dijera? ya hay más partes este como le dijera para donde ir antes nada más pus al jardín y ***yahora*** no ***yaora*** que disco, que más escuelas, más deportivas, áreas verdes…
> …how could I explain you? There are already more parts, how could I explain you, where to go; before there was the main square, and ***already now***, ***already now*** there is the discotheque, there are more schools, more sport clubs, green areas

"Ya ahora" restates the existence of different sources of entertainment in Moroleon that had already been mentioned before using "ya" (already) at the beginning of the utterance.

"Hasta ahora" expresses duration meaning 'up to the moment of speaking'. However, there are some instances where this deictic refers to a near past as seen in example (6). "Hasta ahora" doesn't imply 'until now', but rather 'until two years ago'.

> (6) está en su época de oro, imagínese como es Moroleón. Pus hasta, ***hasta ora*** que hace dos años hastallí terminó *ora* con esto de Salinas de Gortari, allí acabó Moroleón.
> Moroleon is in its golden age, imagine how Moroleon is. Well, ***until now*** that two years ago, up to then the golden age ended with this situation of Salinas de Gortari, the end of Moroleon was there.

"Ahora si" functions as an interjection and it is just present in the speech of Moroleon. It is common in colloquial usage, and it may have an introductory function to present the speaker's opinion as seen in example (7):

> (7) Pus ***ora sí*** que de toda para un lado sescucha de una, para otro lado de otra y para otra de otra. A veces, llevan grabadoras o algunos llevan su estéreo, su modular, los carros es lo que, en lo que ponen su música.
> ***Yunk***, you can listen to all kind of music from everywhere; from one place you listen to one kind, from the other you listen to another kind. Sometimes people take their tape players or some

take their stereo, in the cars is where they play music.

In Kennett Square, by contrast, the occurrences of "ahora", "ahorita" and the reinforced forms double the percentages found in Moroleon. Considering individually the occurrences of "ahora" or "ahorita", there is more than 75% of expressions with the deictic "ahorita" and its reinforced expressions. This may be explained by the mushroom workers level of education; most of them have elementary or less than elementary school education. However, the isolation of the migrant workers also seems to play an important role in these high percentages. These men and women don't have the opportunity to interact with people who have different experiences and different levels of instruction, therefore they don't have any models to strive to imitate and there is no need to reach upper levels in the social stratum because everybody share the same quality of life. The diminutive form of "ahorita" pervade in the community in Kennett Square maybe as a metaphor of their own lives. They need to work in the mushroom farms to survive and to support their families there they live in the darkness and the isolation the same way that the mushrooms need the darkness to grow. This growing in the dark can be a metaphor to illustrate the

inverse effects of accommodation of the community. There are not prestigious forms available to them; they rather adapt their speech to the prevailing one in the farms. In this environment the reinforced expressions with "ahora" offer a great variety of meanings; they seem to fulfill several functions in the informants' speech. Their semantic applications resemble a rainbow with several subtle tones of meaning; adding to the ones exemplified in number (5) they exhibit more uses; in example number (8) "ya ahorita" refers to the immediate moment of the utterance rather than being emphatic:

> (8) Y casi por lo regular cuando voy, casi alla no trabajo por lo mismo de que voy a descansar nada mas un mes, un mes y medio asi y ***ya orita*** se me va olvidando lo de antes mentiende. ***Yaorita*** namas estoy acoplado, acostumbrado aqui.
> And almost regularly when I go, I don't almost work there because of the fact that I go to rest a month, a month and a half, that's all and ***already now*** I am beginning to forget what happened before, do you understand me. ***Already now*** I am used to this life here.

"Como ahorita" (like right now) introduces explanations and comparisons:

> (8) Pura banda, bandas de cualquer musica nomas que sea de banda ***comorita*** andan muchas bandas...por ejemplo la Machos,...
> Just music groups, music groups of any kind of music, it just has to be music group ***like now*** there

are many musical bands...for example the Machos,...

(9)...hastaca a buscar la vida pa'mantener los hijos ***como orita*** tengo ocho de familia fijese.
(I came) up here to try to earn some money to support the children ***like now*** I have eight children, you see.

Interestingly, the most innovative semantic form of "ahora" just appears in Kennett Square, "de ahora" (from now). This deictic refers to the past where "since" or "from then" would better express the idea.

(10) No, pus ya ***deora*** que...hay como mucho video y eso ya casi la mayoria de gente pus pura pelicula es lo que ve uno...
No, ***since*** there are a lot of vodeos and that is what most of the people watches, it's what one watches...

The sociolinguistic factor groups are not relevant in this environment; it seems that once they are in here everybody shares the same usage and overuse of the forms of "ahora". The mushroom workers seem to recycle the vocabulary in the close environment where they interact. The only relevant sociolinguistic factor groups seems to be migration; this discriminates between people who stay in Mexico and the ones who migrate to Kennett Square, placing this last group in an isolated situation where they

feed each other with their own linguistic usage without any possibility of change.

In conclusion, the deictic "ahora" and "ahorita" acquire different meanings in Moroleon and Kennett Square. "Ahora" and "ahorita" may relate to the specific moment of the speaker's utterance. However, their reinforced forms show richer meanings; "ya ahora" may be emphatic, but it may also refer to the precise moment of the utterance. "Hasta ahora" has two meanings implying duration 'up to this point' and 'up to then'. Nevertheless, the most innovative reinforced form is "de ahora" (from now) actually meaning 'from then on'. The different meanings of these deictics and their high percentages of occurrences in Kennett Square suggest the continuous recycling of the mushroom pickers' vocabulary caused by the isolation and alienation in the mushroom farms. To some extent the mushrooms may be seen as a metaphor of their lives; they always live in the darkness and they have a fragile period of live.

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